

THE MIDLAND

A MAGAZINE OF THE MIDDLE WEST

VOL. VIII

OCTOBER, 1922

NO. 10

THE SONS OF DAN

Through great sun-blinded valleys where bones of the
lost are strewn,
To lurching of white-topped wagons and din of household
pans,
To lowing of stumbling cattle, whip-crack, and bitten
groan,
The Mormons march with the Lord of Hosts in the dust
of their caravans.

Their broad-brimmed hats with the tattered rims are
white with alkali,
They ride in a cloud with the sun before like an olden
lure of flame;
They thirst and choke while the women crouch by pallets
where madmen die
Through arrow, and fever, and fortune-thrust for the
glory of God's name.

Ever and ever the scouts drift in with long black guns
unslung,
With tangled beards and red-rimmed eyes that have out-
stared Death's own,
And the wagons wheel as the horses leap, urged on by
lash and lung,
And the charging Kiowas divide on a ring of fire-flecked
stone.

Arises a chant where flame-beds glow to the God of the
Sons of Dan;
Deep coulees throb to thundering hymns that shake the
prairie sod;
And the vast black night that closes down like evil doom
of Man
Quivers long to a battle song of the grim old Mormon
God.

For these are the Men of the Covenant, of the Word and
Avenging Sword,
They ride to the blast of Gabriel, on way to a goodly vale,
By trails of death, by lonely plains, past floods with
never a ford,
They follow a splendid prophecy, a flame, and a Holy
Grail.

And the word of the prophet is certain; they shall build
an abiding-place,
They shall make them another Jerusalem, with a taber-
nacle of prayer;
And the Men of the Lord shall raise them up new seed of
a mighty race
And the Sword of God shall go with them wherever the
bugles blare.

There are bones where the wagons rumble, there are
skulls in the prairie grass,
But on they roll through storm and sun in the might of
a firm accord;
For the Sons of Dan shall greatly thrive whenever it
comes to pass
That they raise them a splendid city to the glory of the
Lord.

THE BALLAD OF A WALKING-BOSS

In a rickety rig on a cloudy day,
With freeze-up hurrying down,
The walking-boss and a straw-boss came
Joggling into town;
Come racketting into Saskatoon
And straight for the Queen Hotel,
Knowing the place was half saloon
And the other half was hell.

Down, down, went the rot-gut rye
As fast as the bar-keep set 'em,
And the walking-boss with a bleary eye
Could scarcely wait to get 'em;
They set 'em up and he put 'em down
And every lick seemed sweeter,
But the little straw-boss he giv' out
And went to sleep by the heater.

And the slusher-men and the teamsters come
With all the trash that are,
And some were strong for the Grand Trunk Line
And some for the C. P. R.,
And some of 'em swore by old Jim Hill
More'n they swore by the Cross,
But the favorite names was 'Dan and Bill'
That hired the walking-boss.

And this was the Fall of Nineteen-eight
When the times was slack and slacker,
With grub-stakes low and credits so
It was hard to get tobaccer;
But the walking-boss had come to town
And it looked like something brewing,
So we hung around and we hung around
For whatever was up and doing.

And after an hour the boss come out
And he staggered a bit and swayed,
And his blind eye goggled and rolled about,
And this is the speech he made:
At least, it's part of his speech, though he
Didn't talk as the preachers do,
And some that he said was a langwidge dead
To all but a grading-crew.

"Lads —" he roared, till the sidewalk shook
With the sounds stentorian —
"Here I am and I works, by God,
For them devils, Bill and Dan:
Twenty years in this damned land
I've scorched and frizzled and friz
In a hundred above to sixty below
As the way of the country is.

"Twenty years in the sand and clay
Of one or another line,
Shoving and driving a right o' way
On grub as 'ud sicken swine;
Cutting sleugh-hay to feed the c'ral
Till the hosses up an' died,
And whenever they fell the harness bruk
Or the string 'ud come untied.

"Rot — rot — in the cooking-pot
And the tents forever in holes;
We didn't care for our bodies much
And we figgered we had no souls;
We was raw and red with the prairie itch,
We was grey-backed head to toes —
Oh, some may talk of the torment rack
But we old graders *knows*.

"Some of the time we'll get our pay,
Most of the time we won't,
But we'll never starve till Doom o' Day
If Bill and Daniel don't —
We may get sick with the pizen stuff
That comes through the cook-shack door,
But them as survives 'ill be so tough
That they'll live for evermore.

"So come along — y' grey-back crew —
I'll hire y' every man,
I'll baste your hides as I always do
For the good of Bill and Dan:
I'll feed y' grub as a dog 'ud scorn,
And drinks as 'ill taste like brine;
I'll make y' wish y' had never been born
But I'll build the Goose-Lake Line."

And in we went to the swimming bar
And the boss he paid the bill —
They set 'em up and we put 'em down
With a grab and a right good will;
Till, one by one, they carried us out
Where the trail to camp began,
Where the walking-boss was sobbing about
The glory of Bill and Dan.

NORTH — NORTH — NORTH

North — north — north —
Plunging towards the Pole;
The horses pound and the oxen plod
And the tin-horn crooks and men of God
Are all on the muster roll.

There's sound of the usual things
That lie in a wagon bed;
Iron that chinks and rings
Like broken chains of the dead;
And clatter of household tins,
And tinkle of hidden glass,
And feet as heavy as lead
Tramping the prairie grass:

And lean, white-bearded men
Stiff with their years and sins,
Chew and mumble, and mumble and chew,
And rumble tales as they always do
When the sap of manhood thins.

'Forty crowded years ago
Up from Iowa they came;
Young and lank and bullock-strong,
And ripped the tough Dakota plain
With bellowed curse and crack of thong:
Upsprung the rustling lakes of grain,
Its promise changed to flame of gold,
But ease was cursed until they sold
And faced the Northern trail again.'

North — north — north —
Into Saskatchewan;
Rolling over the Border Line,
Baggage and beast and man:
Rolling up on the Old Bone Trail
In the wake of the buffalo —
Grim-eyed men in the power of prime
Plunging into the snow.

North to the site of Medicine Hat
To build them a flimsy town;
To hammer it up in the freezing Fall

And next year hammer it down:
On in front of the grading crews;
On while the land was young —
Night and day on a wagon box
With a star at the end of the tongue.

North — north — north —
Under the sun and moon
I saw them raising the shacks and tents
Of an early Saskatoon:
Hammering mightily, breeding there,
Breaking the sod and seeding there,
And ever with gamblers' eyes
Peering afar for a fateful star
That hangs in the Northern skies.

North — north — north —
They were going, and still they go;
They are breaking the far Peace River lands
Where it's seventy-five below —
Where it's seventy-five below
In the Borealis glare,
They have broken the sod, and by grace of God
The wheat is greening there.

North — north — north —
Far up in McKenzieland,
There may be a plot where the soil is hot
And a crop of grain may stand;
And the lean old men with creaking bones
Will out of their chairs and go,
Buckle traces to blind old teams
And head them into the snow —
Into the heart of a lonely land
That leads to the lifeless Pole,
As long as a weary foot may stand
Or a creaking wheel may roll.

A SONG OF DARK HOURS

Oh, Death, come soon —
I am too sick of waiting
Through sleepless nights of horror and of dread —
Oh, Death, come soon :

Let me be gone before another June
Fills this mad world with fragrance of its roses;
Let me lie still where human dust reposes
Under the changing light of sun and moon.

Come, clad in ivory robes of bridal beauty,
I am so weary of this whirling brain
That night and day beats out a dirge of duty
Through murderous hours of pain.

Oh, Shining Love, with the white clinging fingers
That close the eyes in peace of lasting sleep,
Fondle my hair, my brow, till I am deep
In that long slumber where no memory lingers.

Here, in the dark, as in a bridal chamber,
I lie with arms outstretched and open eyes;
I have long known the haunted path that lies
To your abode, and heard thereon a tune
Wailing that wisdom is the shrine of fools.

I have known passion like a searing flame,
Felt Love's hot bosom crushed against my own,
I have known wandering nights of raging shame
And gripped red hands in darkness — and — alone —
Have bowed me down before the altar-stone
Of bloody hate — in hells that I have known —
Oh, Death, come soon.

Let me be done, this night of madness passes;
The light beyond the window-panes is grey;
I shall be silent when the break of day
Ruffles among dried weeds and lifeless grasses —
Would that my sap had gone the selfsame way —
Oh, Death — Oh, Death — come soon.

THE GALES OF AUTUMN ARE COMING

The great gales of Autumn are coming —
Bend, trees; bow to your sorrow:
Fly, red leaves, — you die tomorrow —
The gales of Autumn are coming:
They have tossed and rolled and smashed the sea
Till the sinking sun has bloodied a mad commotion;
Only the vulture keeps the sky
With straining wings and flaming eye —
Foul, ragged ghoul of the darkening ocean.

Woe and chill on a shrouded earth descending
And a nameless fear that steals with breath foreboding,
A creeping whisper of death with love's dreams blending,
A scattered rust that blows for the heart's corroding.

The air is filled with a distant drumming
Of far birds beating southward fast,
The world is filled with roaring and humming
Of far winds thundering blast on blast
Through groaning gulches of northern ranges:
Ho! pines that have strangled the rocks, hold fast!
The clouds are mad, the whole world changes,
The great gales of Autumn are coming.

THE FLEETS OF DOOM

Dark, booming beaches under evil skies,
Clouds torn by the wind and the world a'roar,
And fearful outlines heaving to far thunder,
And all the West aflame with yellow light;
And vast grey monsters riding seas of wonder
Against the gloom of night —

And, sweeping down the mighty tidal surges,
Froth-kissed as ever it veers,
A weird wind wailing olden ocean dirges
For souls of the buccaneers:

For bones of the buccaneers
That lie in the Southern and Northern seas,
For the wave has a love of savagery
And reeking victories:
And the wave's deep love for raging men
And flame and clamor of grappling ships
Is told in the ceaseless miracle song
That rolls from her hungry lips.

* * * * *

Then, sateless vampire, thunder thanks at last:
Our blood must glut you, for the despairing shore,
Riven and drenched by war's red-dripping blast,
Whispers to heaven that it can hold no more.
Stifle all greedy murmur: you shall be
Rimmed with rich floods that shall out-glare the suns,
You shall be poppy steeped with that which we
Pour from the giant lips of roaring guns:

For, in dread harbors where your slow tides tremble
Under the cold grey glances of the day,
The grimly stark leviathans assemble

In battle-stripped array;
And in them slumbers pride of mighty sorrow,
And round them rolls the heavy breath of Fate,
And every hour holds promise of dread morrow
And devastating hate.

WHEN I LAY DOWN MY CRAFTSMAN TOOLS —

When I lay down my craftsman tools and pass
And the wild life of Earth comes drifting in
Upon this garden plot — like secret sin
Into the tender soul of a sweet lass —
When brambles weave and tangle to a mass
Of thorny things, and trees shut out the day,
And sad-eyed friends who loved me wend this way
And find no flowers among the untended grass —

And ponder — with hearts murmuring 'Alas,
Beauty and brain have sought their common clay,
All that he did was as a wind that blows —'
Oh, then let memory see my garden as
It was when breezes made the blossoms sway
And all about was fragrance of the rose.

BIRDS THAT CLEAVE THE SHADOWS

Turquoise tints in the heart of a golden rose,
Carmine fire in a cool white lily cup;
Something blown from out of the sun-drenched vales
Of an old land whose flowers never close;
And again the azure shadows are floating up
And the silver of dawn drifts down,
And comes a whirr of murmuring wings,
A sense of unseen exquisite things,
And a flashing of green and flame
When the grey moths have flown.

From a dim, sweet land of love
Where the Little People have gone,
The Humming-Birds come through the dawn's blue dusk
When Earth-Folk slumber on —
Last of a reign of loveliness
Where tiny souls for long
Walked abroad in a petal dress
And danced to the midge's song.

Now, from the glamor of olden meadows,
From brooks where elfin herdsman sang,
The Humming-Birds pass through the Veil of Shadows —
The Humming-Birds — darting — alone —
And the bent bells and the blooms half-blown
Hear the echo of chimes that rang
When fields of fairy seed were sown.

In the scented hush of a silver hour
When the eyes of June are heavy with sleep,
Oh, Love, Young Love with the face of a flower,
Steal out to our secret garden glade
And, bright on bud and heavy on blade,
You shall see the tears that the Wee Folk weep.

But the sorrow of this shall not be deep
When the last veils are drowsily drawn,
And, flashing and droning, heralding dawn,

Back to Earth come the Humming-Birds:
Back to Earth from a fairy lawn
Where tiny shepherds tend their herds;
From golden vales by an amethyst sea
That moves to a faint old melody —
Back to Earth — darting — alone —
Back from the sweets of elfin meadows —
The bent bells and the blooms half-blown
Bow to the Birds that cleave the Shadows.

IN JANUARY FOG

There, the familiar black old chimney-place
Yawning and huge, filled with mysterious shadows,
And pewter mugs on the heavy mantel shelf
And candlesticks and ancient willow-ware —
And, in the ingle-nook — oh — boyhood's dream!
A flickering glow of firelight on dark hair.

And then the garden gate would creak, and we
Would meet in silence as two shadows meet,
And take the footpath over Bubble Bridge
And watch the town-lights blurring through the fog.

What if the foot-path was a squelching bog?
What if the fog had changed to mizzling rain?
We scarcely knew we loved, but it was sweet
To wander so — and, so back home again.

All under mist and rain and dripping branches,
Soft hands, wet hair, and eyes as pure as dew;
Shy words beneath the spreading cottage thatch
And then you'd go —

I'd hear the clicking latch
And see the firelight's sudden leaping glow
And turn, in youth's mad chivalry of dream,
And tramp the sodden fields all night — with you.

THERE IS A GARDEN IN MY BRAIN —

There is a garden in my brain
And I shall make, before I die,
A thing whose beauty shall be pain;
And men that feel its mystery
Shall climb at midnight through black rain
To sit beneath my twisted firs;
Till when the breast of morning stirs,
And when the winds of morning rise,
They shall go down the hill again
With dreaming hearts and staring eyes.

And when the golden bees awake
To wander through my drifted blooms,
And when the blossomed branches shake
Their perfume into dewy glooms,
And burden silvery spider looms
And fill my paths with fragrant snow,
Oh! then the feet of men shall go
Slowly amid my gold and green
As though in silent, sacred rooms
Where ghosts of long-dead saints are seen.

And, softly, when the day is dead
And flowers that love the dusk unfold,
Softly, oh, softly, feet shall tread
That leave no imprint in the mold;
Nor blade of grass, nor leaf, shall hold
Their dainty trace of shaken dew,
But a strange fragrance, rich and new,
Shall slowly flow through shadows deep
Until the lips of night are cold
And dim things tremble into sleep.

EDITORIALS

With this issue the place of publication of *THE MIDLAND* is changed once more. The editor's occupation takes him to Pittsburgh, and the magazine is issued from the powerful city whose skyscrapers overlook the junction of the Alleghany and Monongahela rivers to form the Ohio: at almost the eastern extremity of the Great Valley, and at a point which was one of the first outposts in the occupation of the middle west by the white race.

THE MIDLAND's journeyings may change the type on its cover; it may suffer modification in size or physical appearance as an indirect result. But its intention and method remain absolutely the same. Its contents will be selected as before, and its spirit will remain unaltered.

I believe that those who have valued the *MIDLAND* for its contents and its spirit may receive it as gladly from the new location as from any other place. I go on with the work with a renewed sense of comradeship with these readers, and in the hope that the *MIDLAND* may reward their loyalty.

I hope that *THE MIDLAND* is not thought to take itself too seriously. I do not want it to seem to assume the air of the Elect. Nor do I desire that its editor be thought of as a pale and serious Martyr to a Cause. I can say truthfully that of many amusing objects in the world, I have yet to find one so laughable as myself; and my sense of the ridiculous in my doings and person extends to my activities in connection with *THE MIDLAND*. I have no illusions as to the magazine's efficacy or importance. It is evident to me that of the things to be done in our time, *THE MIDLAND* will accomplish very few indeed. I am not under the impression that it is leading the forces of

sweetness and light to an overwhelming victory. THE MIDLAND will leave the public taste about as it found it, the American literary situation about as it was.

Indeed, I know that no agency, least of all my own imperfect effort, will greatly change the incredible inertia of the thought and conduct of the race. Nor do I mean or want or hope to change it. THE MIDLAND, conceived as an enterprise, is foredoomed to failure. But I have not learned that, in a good cause, the certainty of defeat is sufficient reason for refusing the fight.

There is pleasure in the associations which THE MIDLAND brings me. There are friendships more satisfying than I could otherwise attain. Of course I am selfish about the matter; and I am abundantly rewarded.

I am writing these editorials — personal notes, rather, from editor to reader — at Glennie. The season is one of supreme beauty in a region always beautiful. The sweep of the long reaches of second growth is suffused with a richness of the approach of autumn. Half hidden by the roadside and about the lake blaze single limbs of maple already colored: ripe orange, vivid scarlet, crimson. The lakes sleep, their waters dulled to gray by the gardens of strange plants that rim their depths. The last whippoorwills call, the bluebirds and plovers gather for their flight. The time and place have, even in this brief sojourn, something of such fulfilment as life accords us. Here is, for today,

“Perfected beauty, wholly of the earth.”

JOHN T. FREDERICK.

*Glennie, Alcona County, Michigan.
September 15, 1922.*

